

DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 333 255

CG 023 408

TITLE Delaware's Dropouts: 1989-1990.
INSTITUTION Delaware State Dept. of Public Instruction, Dover,
Div. of Research and Evaluation.
PUB DATE Nov 90
NOTE 28p.
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Dropout Rate; *Dropouts; Racial Differences;
Secondary Education; *Secondary School Students; Sex
Differences; Statistics; Trend Analysis
IDENTIFIERS *Delaware

ABSTRACT

Delaware annually collects information from the state's secondary schools concerning students who drop out of school. The findings for the 1989-1990 school year revealed that, out of an enrollment of 27,109 students, 1,801 students in grades 9 through 12 left school. The statewide annual dropout rate declined (6.6% versus 7.3% the previous year). Male dropouts outnumbered female dropouts (60% to 40%). Black and Hispanic students dropped out at higher rates than did White/other students, with the annual rate for Blacks being 1.9 times the rate for Whites/others and the annual rate for Hispanics being 2.2 times the rate for Whites/others. While dropout rates were higher for minorities than for Whites/others, in terms of absolute numbers, the majority of the state's dropouts were White (58%). Most of Delaware's dropouts left school in grades 9 or 10 and most were 16 or 17 years old, being overage for grade placement. The annual dropout rate in rural districts was lower than that in non-rural districts. (Five figures and 11 tables are included; a list of alternative school programs in Delaware is appended.) (NB)

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DELAWARE'S DROPOUTS 1989 - 1990

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STATE OF



DELAWARE

DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC INSTRUCTION

DOVER, DELAWARE 19903

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**DELAWARE'S DROPOUTS
1989-1990**

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Document No. 95-01-90/10/09
R & E No. 91-9

DELAWARE'S DROPOUTS, 1989-90

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The 1989-90 Dropout Report reveals the following:

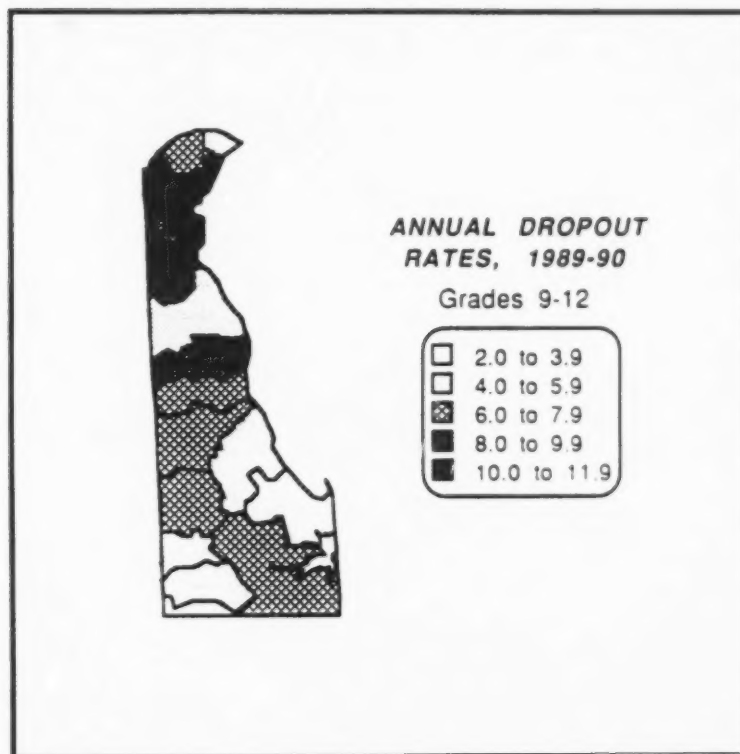
- Last year, 1,801 students in grades 9-12 left school, out of an enrollment of 27,109 students.
- The statewide annual dropout rate declined — 6.6% versus 7.3% the previous year — continuing a gradual downward trend evident throughout the past decade.
- The proportion of dropouts who were male outnumbered the proportion who were female, 60% to 40%.
- Black and Hispanic students dropped out at higher rates than did white/other students. The annual rate for blacks was about 1.9 times the rate for whites/others, while the annual rate for Hispanics was 2.2 times the rate for whites/others.
- While dropout rates were higher for minorities than for whites/others, in terms of absolute numbers, the majority of the state's dropouts were white (58%).
- Most of Delaware dropouts occurred in grades 9 or 10.
- Most dropouts left school when they were 16-17 years (60%), probably a reflection of the mandatory school attendance age of 16. However, when grade and age were analyzed together, it was clear that the majority of dropouts were overage for grade placement (88%).
- The annual dropout rate in rural districts was lower than that in non-rural districts (5.6% versus 7.7%, respectively).

DELAWARE'S DROPOUTS, 1989-90

INTRODUCTION

Many students drop out of school before they are ready to function in today's increasingly competitive work environment. A shrinking pool of workers, particularly at the entry level, has caused businesses to vie for the available qualified high school graduates. Businesses are increasingly finding the need to invest substantially in supplementary training programs, and have shown an eagerness to enter into new partnerships with schools to meet the challenges of changing economic realities. In this climate, the problem of dropouts takes on a particular urgency.

Determining the extent and character of the State's dropout problem is a necessary step in a complete program of identification, intervention, and recovery of students who are educationally at-risk. The Research and Evaluation Division of the Delaware Department of Public Instruction (DPI) annually collects information from the State's secondary schools concerning students who drop out of school. This report summarizes this information for the school year 1989-1990.



Last year, 1,801 students in Grades 9-12 left school, out of an enrollment of 27,109 students, which represents an annual dropout rate of 6.6%. Various characteristics of the State's dropouts are listed in Table 1.

Table 1.

**DELAWARE DROPOUTS 1989-90
SUMMARY STATISTICS
Grades 9-12**

(N=1,801)

	Annual Dropout Rate (%)	Percent of All Dropouts (%)
TOTAL	6.6	100.0
SEX		
Male	8.0 ^a	60.0
Female	5.3 ^a	40.0
RACE / ETHNICITY		
White/Other	5.3	58.2
Black	10.0	37.8
Hispanic	11.9	4.0
AGE		
14-15	— ^b	6.6
16-17	— ^b	59.9
18-19	— ^b	31.4
20-21	— ^b	2.2

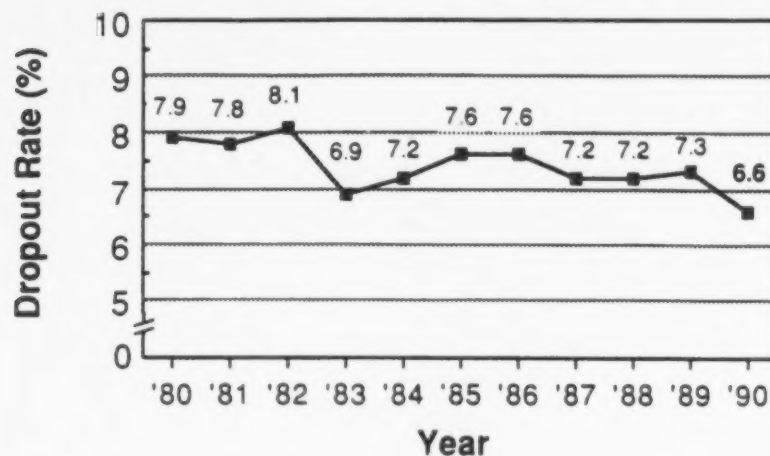
^a Enrollment counts by sex are unavailable; rates are derived from estimated enrollments.

^b Enrollment counts by age are unavailable, so rates cannot be calculated.

Another view of the overall dropout picture in Delaware is provided in Figure 1, which shows the State's annual dropout rates for the past decade. This plot shows that the rate hovered at about 8% annually for the first three years of the decade, then dropped somewhat for the remainder of the decade, to within the 6.9 - 7.6% range. This year's figure represents another drop in the rate—similar to the decrease which occurred between 1981-1982—and is the lowest rate to occur in the 11 years that the annual rate has been counted and reported.

Figure 1.

DELAWARE'S ANNUAL DROPOUT RATE (1980-1990)



METHODOLOGY

A great variety of definitions and calculation methods for quantifying dropouts are currently in use at the national, state and local levels. This lack of standardization has contributed to much confusion, particularly regarding state-by-state and national comparisons. As Rumberger (1987) noted, "no one knows what the high school dropout rate really is in the United States. That is because there is no consensus definition of a high school dropout, nor is there a standard method for computing the dropout rate." Because interested parties may bring different expectations to this discussion, it is important to be explicit at the outset about the definitions and methods used in the Delaware dropout reporting system.

Definition

The definition of a dropout used in the Delaware data collection is as follows:

A dropout is a student who attends at least one day of school during the regular school year, and then discontinues attending school for any reason other than death. Students who officially transfer to another school are not to be included as dropouts. This includes transfers to a Grove's Adult High School or an Alternative School Program (if official enrollment is maintained). Students who graduate, receive a Certificate of Completion, or attend to the legal age of 21 are not considered dropouts.

Several criteria for inclusion in the dropout figures should be noted:

1. Grades included are 9 through 12. Information is also collected on dropouts from grades 7 and 8, enabling the reporting of supplemental statistics concerning these grades. But the standard grade range for most of the statistics reported by the system, including the statewide annual dropout rate, is 9-12. This range has been used consistently for reporting purposes since the 1979-80 school year.
2. Summer, 1989 dropouts are included (i.e., students who were expected to enroll in grades 9-12 in the fall of 1989, but did not do so).
3. Special schools are included.
4. Special students are included.
5. In the Kent and Sussex County Vocational-Technical Districts, only the dropouts from the Intensive Learning Center programs are included. The regular part-time vocational students in these schools are listed within their home school districts.

In addition, new programs that affect dropout status—namely, Alternative Secondary Education programs and direct student transfers to James H. Groves Adult High Schools—were recently implemented in the State. These programs began in the 1989-90 school year following the July 1989 revision of the Delaware Handbook for K-12 Education. The dropout definition was revised to reflect the fact that students who exercise these new options are not classified as dropouts. These changes are consistent with the Council of Chief State School Officers' (CCSSO) Task Force recommendations for the collection of comparable state dropout data for the U.S. Department of Education. It is probable that these programs contributed to the reduction in the annual dropout rate for 1989-90. (See Appendix A for more information on alternative educational programs in the State.)

Procedure

The Data Service Center, located in the Brandywine School District, provides to the DPI a magnetic data tape of information on dropouts in grades 7-12 for the four school districts in New Castle County subject to court-ordered desegregation (Brandywine, Christina, Colonial, and Red Clay Consolidated). This information consists of individual data records written in a standardized format to our specifications. In the 1989-90 school year, this comprised 1057 records, 56% of the state total. These data are submitted in July, covering the period of the previous twelve months (July to June).

All other districts report their dropouts on a monthly basis, covering the same time period, by submitting manual forms from November through June. These forms are accumulated, keyed, and processed by the Department of Public Instruction. This represents 815 records, 44% of the state total. The complete data file is available for analyses in September following the year to be reported.

The dropout data file contains the names and addresses of students who drop out, as well as demographic information such as grade, sex, race, date of birth, and category of exceptionality. In addition, we obtain data concerning reasons for dropping out, as reported to school officials. This set of variables has been collected consistently since the 1978-79 school year. Delaware is one of a growing number of states that currently have the capability to maintain dropout data in terms of individual student records, rather than just aggregate counts.

Types of Calculations

The present report relies on two general types of statistical computations: annual statistics and long-term (i.e., four-year) statistics. These include the following:

1. Annual statistics.

- The **Annual Dropout Rate** is the ratio of dropouts in a single year to enrollment, expressed as a percentage. In Delaware, the accounting period is from the July before the school year of interest through June of the school year (i.e., from spring to spring). Enrollment figures used as the denominators for rate computations are obtained from the fall enrollment count.
- The **Percent of All Dropouts** is a ratio of a subset of dropouts to all dropouts, expressed as a percentage. For example, this computation may be used to express the number of 9th grade dropouts as a percentage of dropouts in all four grades. Depending on the question of interest, however, the denominator may also be a subset of all dropouts in the state. For example, we could express the number of 9th grade dropouts in Sussex County as a percentage of dropouts in all four grades in Sussex County alone.

2. Long-term statistics.

- The **Graduation Rate** is computed by dividing the number of current graduates (1990 in the present report) divided by the ninth grade enrollment four years earlier (1986 in this report), multiplied by 100%.
- The **Four-Year Leaver Rate** is the complement of the four-year graduation rate (i.e., 100% minus the graduation rate).

The graduation statistic has gained a great deal of popularity—some might say notoriety—in discussions of the nation's dropout problem because a version of this statistic is included in the "Secretary's Wall Chart" which is released annually by the United States Department of Education. The complement of the graduation rate (which we are terming here the "four-year leaver rate") is popularly thought of as a dropout statistic. There are problems with this interpretation, however. Chief among these is that the leaver number includes many other categories besides "true" dropouts, such as net student transfers, students who take longer than four years to complete high school, and youngsters who eventually complete their education in an alternative setting. However, the inclusion of graduation and leaver rates in the report acknowledges the importance that many people attach to these numbers. (For further discussion of the issues involved in the various methods, the reader is referred to the selection of references listed at the end of this report.)

Data Limitations

The definitions and methods used in the Delaware dropout accounting system basically rely upon the dependability of administrative record-keeping at the school and/or district level. This method has the advantages of being inexpensive and practical for school and district collectors. The chief disadvantage is uncertainty in separating dropouts from transfers, and accounting for alternative certification outside the school system. Schools do not consistently request transcripts of students from their former schools in all cases, nor is there a consistent standard for the time frame within which such requests should be initiated

and honored. These factors mean that there is a substantial potential for overcounting of dropouts. To the extent that these factors vary across districts and schools (for example, with respect to accessibility of non-public or out-of-state alternatives), comparisons between schools and districts are affected. This problem occurs with both annual and long-term computations.

Another difficulty is that dropouts who subsequently re-enter the public school system following the dropout accounting period are overlooked. The Division of Research and Evaluation is currently studying methods for alleviating this problem, along the lines of the procedures now being evaluated by the CCSSO Task Force, in a current pilot project termed the Dropout Field Test. This project employs a fall-to-fall accounting period, and revises the annual dropout figure by identifying re-entering students in the ending fall count and removing them from the dropout count. In Delaware's case, this would involve the additional step of checking fall rosters for dropouts who re-enter in the school year immediately following the reporting period, a process that would currently have to be done manually for about half of the state's students. In the case of long-term statistics, this would involve tracking students who subsequently enroll in Groves Adult High Schools, GED programs, all non-public schools, and other educational systems.

Another limitation is that some districts have difficulty in collecting all of the data elements requested, particularly with respect to reasons for dropping out. In these case, when students stop attending school, they become unavailable, precluding the sort of interview required to obtain reasons. This is particularly true in the case of "summer dropouts", that is, students who do not return to school after summer sessions.

Finally, the Department of Public Instruction does not collect data on the age and sex of students enrolled in the public schools. Thus, the numbers are unavailable for constructing annual dropout rates by age or sex. However, estimated enrollments by sex may be derived from the proportions of students of each sex who took achievement tests in grades 8 and 11. These estimates were used to calculate the annual rates by sex presented in Table 1.

RESULTS: ANNUAL STATISTICS

Results of the annual dropout study are presented in the following tables and charts. The tabulations are broken out in a variety of ways, which are indicated in bold heads at the left margin, and within the table/figure titles.

— By District and County

A breakdown of the State's dropouts by district is presented in Table 2. The district with the lowest annual dropout rate is New Castle County Vocational-Technical School District, while the lowest regular district is Cape Henlopen School District. The district with the highest annual dropout rate is Christina School District. As the table shows, more than half (63%) of the State's dropouts are from New Castle County schools, which enrolls 60% of the State's students in grades 9 through 12.

— By School

Tables 3 and 4 present breakdowns of the State's dropouts by school. In Table 3, all schools which have at least one of grades 9 through 12 are listed. The schools are listed in order based on the size of the dropout rate, from lowest to highest, within county. In Table 4, which shows annual rates for the last four years, only the high schools are listed, in alphabetical order within county.

Table 2.

DELAWARE DROPOUTS 1989-1990
BY DISTRICT
Grades 9-12

DISTRICT	NO. OF DROPOUTS	NO. OF ENROLLED STUDENTS	ANNUAL DROPOUT RATE
New Castle County	1128	16,245	6.9
Brandywine	131	3,066	4.3
Red Clay	252	3,389	7.4
Appoquinimink	40	493	8.1
Colonial	210	2,109	10.0
Christina	426	4,036	10.6
Kent County	414	5,891	7.0
Smyrna	34	729	4.7
Milford	46	956	4.8
Caesar Rodney	112	1,646	6.8
Lake Forest	63	865	7.3
Capital	155	1,650	9.4
Sussex County	259	4,973	5.2
Cape Henlopen	30	888	3.4
Delmar	13	365	3.6
Laurel	22	514	4.3
Seaford	43	887	4.8
Indian River	113	1,841	6.1
Woodbridge	32	436	7.3
<u>Vocational-Technical Districts</u>			
NCC Vo-Tech	69	3,152	2.2
KC Vo-Tech (ILC)	4	45	8.9
SC Vo-Tech (ILC)	6	42	14.3
STATE	1,801	27,109	6.6

Note: County numbers (in bold) include their respective vocational-technical school districts (which are also listed by themselves at the end of the table).

Table 3.

DELAWARE DROPOUTS 1989-1990
ANNUAL DROPOUT RATES BY SCHOOL
Grades 9-12

School	No. of Dropouts	Sept 30 Enrollment	Annual Dropout Rate
New Castle County	1,128	16,245	6.9
Delcastle Tech HS	12	1,540	0.8
Concord HS	9	1,028	0.9
Paul M. Hodgson	22	904	2.4
John Dickinson HS	31	718	4.3
Mt Pleasant HS	29	661	4.4
A. I. duPont HS	50	1,061	4.7
Thomas McKean HS	41	863	4.8
Howard Career Ctr	35	708	4.9
Brandywine HS	46	856	5.4
Middletown HS	40	493	8.1
Newark HS	119	1,275	9.3
Christiana HS	130	1,369	9.5
Claymont HS	47	475	9.9
William Penn HS	208	2,041	10.2
Glasgow HS	154	1,254	12.3
Wilmington HS	105	660	15.9
Kent County	414	5,891	7.0
Smyrna HS	34	729	4.7
Milford SR HS	46	956	4.8
Caesar Rodney HS	111	1,597	7.0
Lake Forest HS	63	865	7.3
Kent Voc-Tech ILC	4	45	8.9
Dover HS	155	1,632	9.5
Sussex County	259	4,973	5.2
Milton Jr HS (9)	0	75	0.0
Rehoboth Jr HS (9)	0	40	0.0
Cp Henlopen-Lewes (9)	1	107	0.9
Selbyville Mid (9-12)	7	245	2.9
Sussex Central Jr HS (9)	9	269	3.3
Delmar Jr-Sr HS	13	365	3.6
Laurel Sr HS	22	514	4.3
Cape Henlopen HS (10-12)	29	661	4.4
Seaford SR HS	43	878	4.9
Sussex Central Sr HS (10-12)	42	696	6.0
Woodbridge HS	32	436	7.3
Indian River HS (10-12)	54	580	9.3
Sussex Voc-Tech ILC	6	42	14.3
(Special schools, 9-12 graders)	52	471	11.0
STATE	1,801	27,109	6.6

Note: All schools with at least one of grades 9 through 12 are listed. If a school does not have all four grades, the included grades are indicated in parentheses following the school's name. County number (in bold) include special schools.

Table 4.
ANNUAL DROPOUT RATES BY SCHOOL, 1986-1990
Grades 9-12

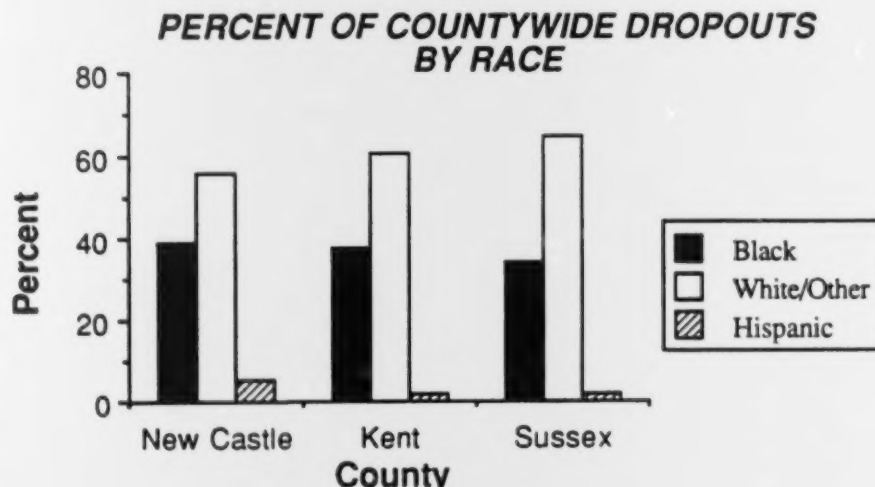
	89-90			88-89			87-88			86-87		
	TOTAL	TOTAL	%	TOTAL	TOTAL	%	TOTAL	TOTAL	%	TOTAL	TOTAL	%
HIGH SCHOOLS	ENROLLMENT	DROPOUTS	DROPOUTS	ENROLLMENT	DROPOUTS	DROPOUTS	ENROLLMENT	DROPOUTS	DROPOUTS	ENROLLMENT	DROPOUTS	DROPOUTS
NEW CASTLE CO.												
Concord	1,028	9	0.9	1,077	32	3.0	1,166	55	4.7	1,263	56	4.4
Dickinson	718	31	4.3	756	56	7.4	806	53	6.6	855	63	7.4
Mount Pleasant	661	29	4.4	693	29	4.2	735	34	4.6	735	58	7.9
A. I. duPont	1,061	50	4.7	1,100	36	3.3	1,146	50	4.4	1,128	38	3.4
McKean	863	41	4.8	835	61	7.3	870	69	7.9	929	57	6.1
Brandywine	856	46	5.4	847	42	5.0	928	35	3.8	989	39	3.9
Middletown	493	40	8.1	516	36	7.0	544	54	9.9	569	32	5.6
Newark	1,275	119	9.3	1,318	85	6.4	1,366	85	6.2	1,422	96	6.8
Christiana	1,369	130	9.5	1,291	117	9.1	1,318	105	8.0	1,379	111	8.0
Claymont	475	47	9.9	609	49	8.0	652	45	6.9	664	54	8.1
William Penn	2,041	208	10.2	2,045	216	10.6	2,131	254	11.9	2,130	271	12.7
Glasgow	1,254	154	12.3	1,257	138	11.0	1,353	112	8.3	1,341	142	10.6
Wilmington	660	105	15.9	675	142	21.0	742	145	19.5	803	129	16.1
KENT CO.												
Smyrna	729	34	4.7	768	51	6.6	799	48	6.0	817	54	6.6
Milford	956	46	4.8	977	43	4.4	959	55	5.7	958	39	4.1
Caesar Rodney	1,597	111	7.0	1,646	113	6.9	1,514	109	7.2	1,548	123	7.9
Lake Forest	865	63	7.3	901	78	8.7	900	91	10.1	878	55	6.3
Dover	1,632	155	9.5	1,685	159	9.4	1,754	165	9.4	1,724	185	10.7
SUSSEX CO.												
Delmar Jr.-Sr.	365	13	3.6	383	22	5.7	399	17	4.3	397	20	5.0
Laurel	514	22	4.3	495	52	10.5	533	39	7.3	548	48	8.8
Cape Henlopen	661	29	4.4	689	51	7.4	745	58	7.8	767	49	6.4
Seaford	878	43	4.9	896	65	7.3	957	49	5.1	981	62	6.3
Sussex Central	696	42	6.0	762	78	10.2	776	62	8.0	761	51	6.7
Woodbridge	436	32	7.3	456	44	9.6	471	31	6.6	479	40	8.4
Indian River	580	54	9.3	600	47	7.8	601	45	7.5	607	42	6.9
VO-TECH (Full-Time)												
Delcastle Tech.	1,540	12	0.8	1,572	28	1.8	1,664	18	1.1	1,818	19	1.0
Hodgson Vo-Tech	904	22	2.4	940	18	1.9	597	17	2.8	541	11	2.0
Howard Career Ctr.	708	35	4.9	729	55	7.5	1,015	59	5.8	1,020	59	5.8
Kent Co. V-T ILC	45	4	8.9	45	11	24.4	42	14	33.3	23	0	0.0
Sussex Co. V-T ILC	42	6	14.3	46	0	0.0	35	14	40.0	21	4	19.0
Other schools with 9th grade students	1,207	69		1,183	80		1,427	95		1,508	123	
TOTAL	27,109	1,801	6.6	27,792	2,034	7.3	28,945	2,082	7.2	29,603	2,130	7.2

The presentation of dropout statistics computed at the school level may encourage misleading comparisons between the schools with respect to the effectiveness of their educational activities. Such comparisons are inappropriate because different school systems serve different student populations, who may have differential tendencies to drop out of school. Thus, firm conclusions about the school programs themselves are unwarranted. Nevertheless, dropout statistics computed at the school level are often thought of as useful indicators of the challenges which the various schools face. They were, for example, included in the School Profile Reports on Delaware's high schools which were inaugurated last year.

— By Race

A breakdown of the State's dropouts by race and district is provided in Table 5. The relative proportions of dropouts in the various racial/ethnic groups are also displayed in Figure 3, which aggregates the data by county. Basically, the patterns revealed follow the demographics of the racial and ethnic groups in the State. That is, the proportions of dropouts who are either black or Hispanic are highest in the New Castle County school districts, followed by the Kent and Sussex County districts, in that order--which parallels the distribution of racial/ethnic groups as a whole in the State. With respect to statewide annual dropout rates, black and Hispanic students dropout at higher rates than do white/other students. The annual rate for blacks is about 1.9 times the rate for whites/others, while the annual rate for Hispanics is 2.2 times the rate for whites/others. This is a pattern which is consistent with minority trends nationwide. In Sussex County, however, the annual dropout rate for blacks in two districts is comparable to or lower than that for whites.

Figure 3.



Note: This figure is interpreted as follows: Of the total number of dropouts in New Castle County, 39% of them were black, 56% were white/other, and so on.

Table 5.

DELAWARE DROPOUTS 1988-1989
BY RACE AND DISTRICT
Grades 9-12

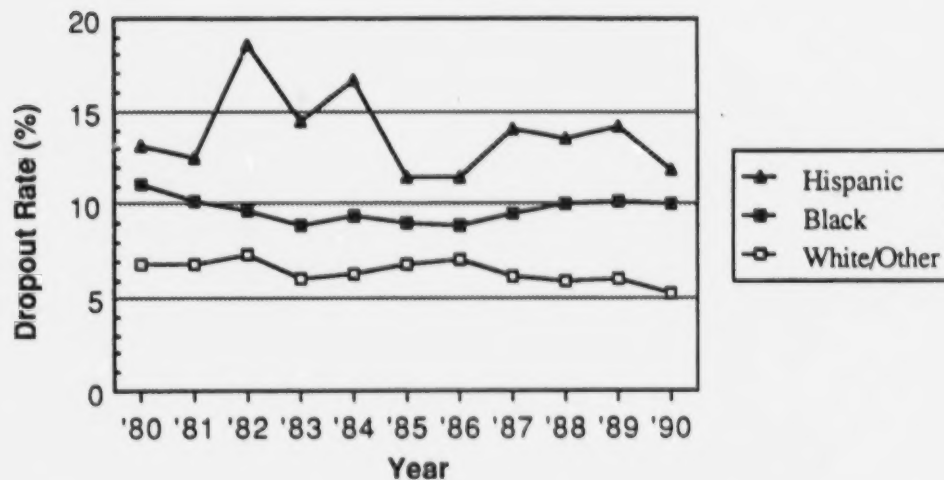
DISTRICT	NO. OF DROPOUTS	ANNUAL DROPOUT RATE (%)				PERCENT OF ALL DROPOUTS (%)			
		Black	Hispanic	White/ Other	ALL	Black	Hispanic	White/ Other	ALL
REGULAR									
<u>New Castle County</u>									
Appoquinimink	40	12.0	0.0	7.5	8.1	22.5	0.0	77.5	100.0
Brandywine	131	7.6	5.6	3.2	4.3	41.2	1.5	57.3	100.0
Christina	426	16.7	13.3	8.4	10.6	39.0	3.3	57.7	100.0
Colonial	210	14.4	16.1	8.1	10.0	39.5	2.4	58.1	100.0
Red Clay	252	12.6	20.3	4.7	7.4	40.5	14.7	44.8	100.0
<u>Kent County</u>									
Caesar Rodney	112	10.5	2.4	5.9	6.8	33.0	0.9	66.1	100.0
Capital	155	12.5	20.8	7.5	9.4	45.2	3.2	51.6	100.0
Lake Forest	63	14.9	0.0	5.8	7.3	34.9	0.0	65.1	100.0
Millford	46	8.9	4.2	3.6	4.8	41.3	2.2	56.5	100.0
Smyrna	34	8.5	0.0	4.2	4.7	20.6	0.0	79.4	100.0
<u>Sussex County</u>									
Cape Henlopen	30	3.3	16.7	3.2	3.4	26.7	6.7	66.7	100.0
Delmar	13	2.1	0.0	3.8	3.6	7.7	0.0	92.3	100.0
Indian River	113	8.2	16.7	5.4	6.1	32.7	1.8	65.5	100.0
Laurel	22	5.4	0.0	4.0	4.3	27.3	0.0	72.7	100.0
Seaford	43	8.1	0.0	3.7	4.8	44.2	0.0	55.8	100.0
Woodbridge	32	12.0	0.0	5.5	7.3	46.9	0.0	53.1	100.0
VOCATIONAL-TECHNICAL									
NCC Vo-Tech	69	2.2	2.7	2.2	2.2	33.3	4.3	62.3	100.0
KC Vo-Tech (ILC)	4	5.9	0.0	11.1	8.9	25.0	0.0	75.0	100.0
SC Vo-Tech (ILC)	6	11.8	0.0	16.0	14.3	33.3	0.0	66.7	100.0
TOTAL	1801	10.0	11.9	5.3	6.6	37.8	4.0	58.2	100.0

Note: The dropout counts include students in grades 9-12 who left school between 7/89 and 6/90 (i.e., summer 1989 dropouts are included). Dropout rates are based on September 30, 1989 enrollment figures. Special students in both regular and special schools are included. The dropout rates for the Kent and Sussex County Vocational-Technical Districts include only the students in the Intensive Learning Center programs; regular vocational students are counted in their home school districts.

Figure 4 displays trends in the annual dropout rates for blacks, Hispanics, and whites/others in the past decade. This plot shows that the rate for blacks decreased steadily between 1980-1983, more or less leveled off from 1983-1986, then climbed for two years, reaching a plateau of about 10% in the last three years. The rate for Hispanics peaked dramatically in the first half of the decade, then peaked again less sharply in the last half, and decreased substantially from last year to this year. The rate for whites/others, which gradually crept upward from 1983-1986, has been gradually decreasing since then. Throughout this period, Hispanics consistently had the highest dropout rates followed by black and whites/others. Note from Table 5, however, that while dropout rates are higher for minorities than for whites/others, in terms of absolute numbers the majority of the state's dropouts are white (58%).

Figure 4.

**DELAWARE'S ANNUAL DROPOUT RATE (1980-1990)
BY RACE**



— By Grade

A breakdown of the State's dropouts by grade and district is presented in Table 6. This table shows that, overall, the annual dropout rate is highest among 10th graders and lowest among 12th graders. Local variations in this pattern are notable, however. For example, in two of the districts in Sussex County, the lowest dropout levels are found among 9th graders. These are the two districts in the State whose high schools consist of Grades 10-12 rather than 9-12, which probably accounts for this pattern. In the Cape Henlopen and Delmar districts, more than half of the districts' dropouts occur in the 10th grade, as well as nearly half of Indian River district's dropouts. On the other hand, more than 45% of the districts' dropouts occur in the 9th grade in Appoquinimink, Lake Forest, and Woodbridge.

Table 6.

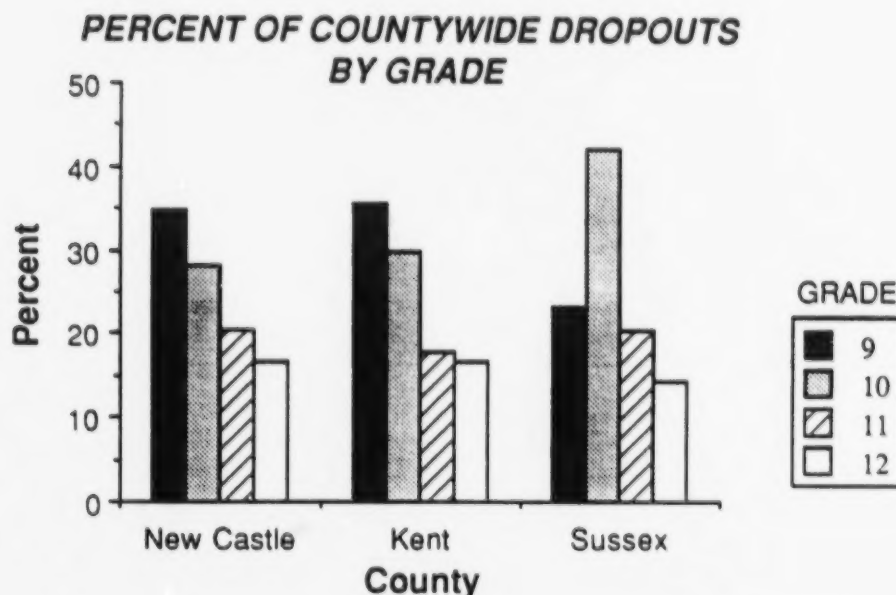
DELAWARE DROPOUTS 1989-1990
BY GRADE AND DISTRICT
Grades 9-12

ANNUAL DROPOUT RATE (%)							PERCENT OF ALL DROPOUTS (%)				
DISTRICT	NO. OF DROPOUTS	9	10	11	12	ALL	9	10	11	12	ALL
REGULAR											
<u>New Castle County</u>											
Appoquinimink	40	12.9	6.3	4.8	7.1	8.1	47.5	20.0	12.5	20.0	100.0
Brandywine	131	4.7	4.9	4.8	2.6	4.3	29.0	30.5	26.0	14.5	100.0
Christina	426	12.9	11.1	9.0	8.0	10.6	39.0	25.6	18.8	16.7	100.0
Colonial	210	11.6	11.7	8.5	6.9	10.0	36.7	31.0	17.1	15.2	100.0
Red Clay	252	8.8	8.2	6.5	5.4	7.4	35.3	29.8	19.8	15.1	100.0
<u>Kent County</u>											
Caesar Rodney	112	7.6	6.4	6.5	6.5	6.8	32.1	24.1	19.6	24.1	100.0
Capital	155	12.5	10.1	8.3	5.1	9.4	39.4	31.6	17.4	11.6	100.0
Lake Forest	63	11.2	7.0	3.5	5.6	7.3	46.0	28.6	9.5	15.9	100.0
Millford	46	4.2	5.2	4.6	5.3	4.8	23.9	28.3	21.7	26.1	100.0
Smyrna	34	3.2	8.4	5.5	0.7	4.7	20.6	50.0	26.5	2.9	100.0
<u>Sussex County</u>											
Cape Henlopen	30	0.9	6.9	2.9	2.0	3.4	6.7	60.0	20.0	13.3	100.0
Delmar	13	3.9	9.0	1.0	1.1	3.6	30.8	53.8	7.7	7.7	100.0
Indian River	113	3.4	11.8	4.7	4.6	6.1	14.2	48.7	18.6	18.6	100.0
Laurel	22	3.6	7.1	6.0	0.8	4.3	27.3	40.9	27.3	4.5	100.0
Seaford	43	5.7	4.2	6.2	3.3	4.8	34.9	23.3	25.6	16.3	100.0
Woodbridge	32	10.6	6.5	7.4	2.6	7.3	46.9	25.0	21.9	6.3	100.0
VOCATIONAL-TECHNICAL											
NCC Vo-Tech	69	0.4	2.8	4.0	2.1	2.2	4.3	31.9	34.8	29.0	100.0
KC Vo-Tech (ILC)	4	12.5	0.0	0.0	50.0	8.9	75.0	0.0	0.0	25.0	100.0
SC Vo-Tech (ILC)	6	10.0	20.0	10.0	50.0	14.3	33.3	33.3	16.7	16.7	100.0
TOTAL	1,801	7.7	7.8	6.1	4.7	6.6	33.3	30.6	19.8	16.3	100.0

Notes: The dropout counts include students in grades 9-12 who left school between 7/89 and 6/90 (i.e., summer 1989 dropouts are included). Dropout rates are based on September 30, 1989 enrollment figures. Special students in both regular and special schools are included. The dropout rates for the Kent and Sussex County Vocational-Technical Districts include only the students in the Intensive Learning Center programs; regular vocational students are counted in their home school districts.

County-wide patterns may be viewed overall in Figure 5. In this chart, it appears that the highest proportion of dropouts are 9th graders, followed by 10th, 11th, and 12th graders in decreasing proportions, in both New Castle and Kent Counties. The same pattern nearly holds in Sussex County, but the proportion of dropouts jumps to a high of 42% at Grade 10, followed by decreasing proportions of the remaining grades. Again, this difference may be related to differences in grade structure of the schools in the three counties. The high schools in both New Castle and Kent Counties consist exclusively of grades 9-12, whereas the grade groupings in Sussex County upper-level schools are quite variable-- being either 7-12, 9-12, or 10-12. The relatively low proportions of 9th grade dropouts in Cape Henlopen and Indian River, and the relatively high proportions of 10th grade dropouts in Cape Henlopen, Delmar, and Indian River may be chiefly responsible for the difference in aggregate Sussex County figures, relative to New Castle and Kent Counties.

Figure 5



Note: This figure is interpreted as follows: Of the total number of dropouts in New Castle County, 35% of them were 9th graders, 28% were 10th graders, 20% were 11th graders, and so on.

— By Age

Another characteristic of the dropout population is revealed by grouping the data by grade and age simultaneously. This age/grade data may be used to categorize dropouts as underage, overage, or at the appropriate age for grade placement. To do this, we calculated appropriate ages at each grade for each month of the school year, based on the appropriate age of school entry described in Delaware school regulations, that is, entry in the school year beginning in the calendar year when a child reaches the age of 5. (Although some students could be up to a year older than these "appropriate" ages, if their initial school

entry was waived for a year at age 5, this occurs relatively infrequently in the State). These ages were compared to the actual ages of each dropout, based on birthday and drop date, accurate to within two weeks. The students were then sorted into "under-age", "age-appropriate", and "over-age" categories. The resulting analysis shows clearly that most dropouts were overage for grade placement (see Table 7). Overall, 88% of the dropouts were classified as overage. The proportion of dropouts who were overage decreased with increasing grade level, probably due to the attrition of so many overage dropouts in the earlier grades.

The significance of so many overage dropouts is this: overage grade placement is primarily due to grade retention (i.e., repeating a grade). Grade retention is a fairly well-documented indicator of risk for dropping out. However, grade retention is one factor which can be manipulated by educational policy-makers. Therefore, it seems desirable to review grade retention policies and practices in the State with an eye toward their appropriateness, not only in achieving curricular goals and meeting educational standards, but also in reducing the dropout rate.

Table 7.

DELAWARE DROPOUTS, 1989-90
UNDERAGE, OVERAGE, OR AGE-APPROPRIATE FOR GRADE LEVEL

	Grade				Grades 9-12
	9	10	11	12	
Overage	97.3%	91.7%	77.8%	71.7%	87.6%
Appropriate	2.5	7.8	21.6	26.9	11.9
Underage	0.2	0.5	0.6	1.4	0.6
Totals	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Note: Entries are percents by column.

Although the bulk of the analyses in this report are concerned with dropouts in grades 9 through 12, it is also important to look at dropouts in the earlier grades. Table 8 presents data for those dropouts from grades 7 and 8. Note that, because the rates are so low in proportion to the numbers of 7th and 8th grade students, the rates are expressed in "per 1000" units rather than the usual percents in order to make it easier to read the values.

As expected, there are more dropouts by number and rate in Grade 8 than in Grade 7. Also, the rate is slightly higher in Kent County than in the other two counties.

Table 8.
DELAWARE DROPOUTS, 1989-90
Grades 7-8

	Grade				Grades 7-8	
	7		8			
	No. of Drops	Rate per 1000	No. of Drops	Rate per 1000	No. of Drops	Rate per 1000
New Castle	9	2.1	30	7.5	39	4.7
Kent	4	2.4	17	10.4	21	6.3
Sussex	2	1.4	9	6.9	11	4.1
Total	15	2.0	56	8.1	71	4.9

— By Rural/Non-rural

Table 9 displays a breakdown of dropouts with respect to residence in a "rural" or "non-rural" district. These designations were developed by the Delaware Research for Better Schools Rural Assistance Council in connection with a study of rural education conducted about one and a half years ago. The definition they developed for a rural district is as follows:

... those districts with fewer than 3,400 students or less than \$130,000 full valuation of real estate per pupil in the 1988-89 school year. Included are districts with no or limited beach development, that are sparsely populated, and lack extensive business and industrial facilities.

By this definition, the following districts are designated as rural districts: Appoquinimink, Delmar, Lake Forest, Laurel, Milford, Seaford, Smyrna, and Woodbridge. The remaining districts in the state, then, are designated as non-rural. In Table 9, statewide figures are computed with and without the vocational-technical districts, in order to aid interpretation of the results. (A vocational-technical district has county-wide boundaries, so it may span districts of both types, and may only include a portion of some districts).

The table shows that dropout rates are higher in the non-rural districts than in the rural ones. Furthermore, this difference is particularly accentuated with respect to Hispanics.

— By Reasons

Dropout data collectors, chiefly high school guidance counselors, were asked to solicit the reasons given by the students for dropping out. The data collection form distinguished three broad classes of reasons: School, Economic, and Personal. Data collectors were

Table 9.

DELAWARE DROPOUTS 1989-90
RURAL/NON-RURAL COMPARISONS BY RACE

	Black			Hispanic			White/Other			Total		
	No. Drop	No. Enroll	% of Enroll	No. Drop	No. Enroll	% of Enroll	No. Drop	No. Enroll	% of Enroll	No. Drop	No. Enroll	% of Enroll
Rural	98	1,036	9.5	1	50	2.0	194	4,159	4.7	293	5,245	5.6
Non-rural	557	4,703	11.8	68	444	15.3	804	13,478	6.0	1,429	18,625	7.7
State (excl. Vo-Techs)	655	5,739	11.4	69	494	14.0	998	17,637	5.7	1,722	23,870	7.2
State (Incl. Vo-Techs)	681	6,832	10.0	72	607	11.9	1,048	19,670	5.3	1,801	27,109	6.6

Note: Definitions of rural and non-rural developed by Delaware Rural Assistance Council (see Profiles of Rural Education in the Mid-Atlantic Region, Philadelphia: Research for Better Schools, 1989).

asked to record at least one "School" reason; optionally, a maximum of one response could be recorded in each of the other broad categories if additional information were available. Data on "School" reasons were provided for 1322 students (73.4% of the total dropouts). The results of this effort are displayed in Table 10.

Table 10.

DELAWARE DROPOUTS, 1989-90
REASONS FOR DROPPING OUT
(As reported by school officials)

Reason	Number of Responses	Percent of Category
School		
Academic	217	16.4%
Discipline	66	5.0
Poor Attendance	<u>1039</u>	<u>78.6</u>
Total	1322	100.0
Economic		
Desire to Work	271	82.9
Financial Response	20	6.1
Needed at Home	26	8.0
Other	<u>10</u>	<u>3.0</u>
Total	327	100.0
Personal		
Illness	9	6.6
Pregnant	24	17.6
Married	19	14.0
Care for Child	39	28.7
Other	<u>45</u>	<u>33.1</u>
Total	136	100.0

Note: One response was required in the "School" category. Optionally, a response in one or both of the categories "Economic" and "Personal" could be supplied, if available.

LONG-TERM (FOUR-YEAR) RATES

Table 11 presents another type of statistic than those previously presented in this report, namely, 4-year graduation and "leaver" rates. (The definitions for these numbers are given earlier in the Methodology section.) The leaver rate is widely considered to be an measure of a school's overall dropout rate, although it includes a number of other categories of students, such as students who transfer to other schools and programs, and students who take longer than the traditional four years to graduate. However, it is still used as a rough estimate of a school's dropout situation, and enjoys an additional measure of popularity because of its inclusion in the U. S. Department of Education's Wall Chart. Table 12 presents a similar calculation although, unlike the Wall Chart, it is not adjusted for student migration effects and ungraded students.

Table 11.

**DELAWARE DROPOUTS 1989-90
FOUR-YEAR GRADUATION RATES, BY SCHOOL**

SCHOOL	1986 9TH Grade Enrollment	1990 Grade	4-Year ^a Graduation Rate (%)	4-Year ^b Leaver Rate (%)
New Castle County				
Mt Pleasant HS	166	147	88.6	11.4
A. I. duPont HS	254	216	85.0	15.0
Brandywine HS	220	181	82.3	17.7
John Dickinson HS	206	160	77.7	22.3
Concord HS	331	255	77.0	23.0
Newark HS	380	288	75.8	24.2
Christiana HS	382	289	75.7	24.3
Paul M. Hodgson	255	190	74.5	25.5
Middletown HS	144	104	72.2	27.8
Thomas McKean HS	234	168	71.8	28.2
Delcastle Tech HS	400	286	71.5	28.5
William Penn HS	616	403	65.4	34.6
Glasgow HS	379	240	63.3	36.7
Howard Career Ctr	219	124	56.6	43.4
Wilmington HS	288	152	52.8	47.2
Claymont HS	226	103	45.6	54.4
M.S. Sterck	9	2	22.2	77.8
Kent County				
Milford SR HS	284	217	76.4	23.6
Smyrna HS	219	160	73.1	26.9
Caesar Rodney HS	481	339	70.5	29.5
Lake Forest HS	270	175	64.8	35.2
Dover HS	508	319	62.8	37.2
Sussex County				
Cape Henlopen HS	257 c	205	79.8	20.2
Indian River HS	197 c	153	77.7	22.3
Delmar Jr/Sr HS	111	83	74.8	25.2
Laurel HS	160	115	71.9	28.1
Sussex Central HS	286 c	201	70.3	29.7
Seaford SR HS	286	197	68.9	31.1
Woodbridge HS	144	78	68.5	31.5
STATE	8103^d	5550	68.5	31.5

a The four-year graduation rate = the number of 1990 graduates divided by the 9th grade enrollment four years earlier (1985-86), multiplied by 100%.

b The leaver rate = 100% - four-year graduation rate. This number includes many categories of students in addition to true dropouts, and is not corrected for net student transfers, net interstate migration, students who complete a GED or alternative certification program, or students who take more than 4 years to complete high school.

c Schools with grades 10-12 only. 1987 10th-grade enrollment was used as the base for computing the school's graduation rate.

d Total statewide 1989 9th-grade enrollment. This does not equal the sum of the column entries due to the exceptions noted above.

CONCLUSIONS

Dropping out of high school continues to be seen as a serious educational and social problem. Individually, the consequences of failure to complete high school typically include limited economic and psychological well-being that persists throughout adulthood. The social consequences, in terms of lowered productivity and increased dependence on social support programs, may run into the billions of dollars.

Concern over the problem of dropouts at both national and local levels has been increasing among educators and policymakers in recent years. Two factors may be driving this renewed interest. First, there is concern over America's economic competitiveness in today's global market economy, and a skilled, well-educated work force is considered vital to our national interest. Second, increased attention has been paid to developing a set of key indicators for judging the performance of school systems, and dropout figures are seen as appropriate, in part, for measuring how well educational systems are doing their jobs.

The State of Delaware has a vital interest in understanding and dealing with the conditions that lead to the decision to drop out of school prematurely. The State Board of Education, in its proposed Goals and Mission Statement currently being circulated for comment, is specifically committed to reducing the four-year dropout rate to 10% by the year 2000. A necessary first step is securing an accurate description of the nature and scope of the State's dropout problem, to support informed policy-making. The Research and Evaluation Division of the Department of Public Instruction continues to supply timely, informative data on the State's dropouts, and strives to improve and refine our data collection efforts to increase the value of this information.

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APPENDIX A. ALTERNATIVE SCHOOL PROGRAMS

There are five types of programs that may be considered alternative education programs for secondary-school age youngsters in the State. These are:

1. General Educational Development Test (GED). Students take a test to earn a high school equivalency credential (not a high school diploma). They may prepare for this test in a number of ways, which may include course work obtained from a variety of sources.
2. James H. Groves Adult High School. These are established for any students who have been out of school and who are at least 16 years of age. A six-month waiting period is designated for entry. After completing the program, students earn a high-school diploma issued by the Groves school.
3. Direct Groves transfer. This option refers to students whose school principals recommends transfer directly to a Groves Adult High School rather than withdrawal from high school (i.e., the six-month waiting period is waived). Students are considered officially transferred after the Groves principal enrolls the student and the student has attended one class. They also earn a Groves High School diploma.
4. Alternative Secondary Education Programs. Under this option, students continue their education in the high school under a flexible schedule that may involve attendance during extended-day, evening, and extended-year scheduling. Students ultimately receive high school diplomas from their home high schools. Students, to be eligible, must remain enrolled at the high school day program or work study program for at least one credit.
5. After Hours Transition Program. This program provides a transitional educational setting for students re-entering the home high school or other educational setting. The student may be expelled (for any except drug-related expulsions), a dropout, enrolled in a GED or other part-time educational program, or referred by a middle school intervention team (8th grade student 16 years or older). They earn 1/4 credit toward high school graduation or GED.

Prior to the 1989-90 school year, students had only the first two options; those who chose them were categorized officially as dropouts. In July 1989, with the revision of the Delaware Handbook for K-12 Education, options 3 through 5 became available. Students in categories 3 and 4 are not classified as dropouts, and are not counted in the 1989-90 figures. This is consistent with the definition of dropouts which is currently being field tested by the Council of Chief State School Officers and the National Center for Education Statistics in connection with their Dropout Field Test. This project which is expected to yield recommendations for valid, comparable statistical procedures for the states to be implemented in the 1991-92 school year.